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The economic and environmental maximization of fossil fuel resources

Welcome delegates to the United Nations Environment Assembly of SharkMUN 2026.

In this committee, delegates will debate one of the most controversial and globally significant environmental issues of the modern era: the continued exploitation of fossil fuel resources and its economic and environmental implications. Fossil fuels remain the foundation of the global economy, powering industries, transportation systems, and national development. However, their extraction and consumption are also among the leading causes of climate change, pollution, and ecosystem destruction.

Delegates must evaluate the balance between economic growth, energy security, environmental sustainability, and international climate commitments. This topic requires discussion regarding energy dependence, environmental justice, green transitions, technological innovation, and geopolitical competition over natural resources. UNEA provides a platform for environmental diplomacy and international cooperation. Delegates are encouraged to develop realistic, innovative, and sustainable solutions capable of addressing both global energy needs and environmental protection.

Introduction

Fossil fuels, including oil, natural gas, and coal, have played a central role in global industrialization and economic development for more than a century. Today, they continue to supply most of the world's energy demands and remain critical to transportation, manufacturing, electricity generation, and international trade.

Despite their economic importance, fossil fuels are also one of the principal contributors to environmental degradation. The burning of fossil fuels releases greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide



and methane, which accelerate global warming and climate change. Fossil fuel extraction additionally causes oil spills, air pollution, habitat destruction, water contamination, and biodiversity loss.

The issue creates a major international dilemma. Many countries depend heavily on fossil fuel exports or affordable fossil energy to sustain economic development and reduce poverty. Developing nations often argue that rapid restrictions on fossil fuel use could slow economic growth and deepen inequality. At the same time, scientific organizations warn that continued fossil fuel dependence threatens global climate stability. Rising temperatures, extreme weather events, sea-level rise, desertification, and ecosystem collapse increasingly affect countries worldwide.

The international community remains divided regarding how quickly the global economy should transition toward renewable energy. Some states support aggressive decarbonization policies, while others prioritize energy security, industrial competitiveness, and economic sovereignty.

UNEA must therefore examine how countries can maximize the economic benefits of fossil fuel resources while minimizing environmental damage and ensuring long-term sustainability.

Timeline of Key Fossil Fuel & Climate Events

Year	Event
1992	UNFCCC was adopted at the Rio Earth Summit
1997	The Kyoto Protocol establishes the first binding emissions targets.
2015	Paris Agreement sets 1.5°C/2°C warming limits.
2019	Over 100 cities worldwide declare climate emergencies.



Year	Event
2022	Global energy crisis following geopolitical conflicts; fossil fuel subsidies reach \$7 trillion.
2023	COP28 calls for "transitioning away from fossil fuels" (first explicit mention)
2024	Record high atmospheric CO ₂ concentrations confirmed

Key terms

Fossil Fuels

Natural energy resources such as coal, oil, and natural gas are formed from ancient organic material.

Decarbonization

The process of reducing carbon emissions through cleaner energy systems and sustainable technologies.

Energy Security

The ability of a country to maintain reliable and affordable access to energy resources.

Climate Change

Long-term alterations in global climate patterns are primarily caused by greenhouse gas emissions.

Current situation

Fossil fuels currently account for the majority of global energy production. Oil and gas industries generate significant economic revenue, employment opportunities, and geopolitical influence for many countries.



However, fossil fuel consumption remains the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions worldwide. According to international climate scientists, limiting global warming requires substantial reductions in carbon emissions over the coming decades. Environmental consequences associated with fossil fuels include air pollution, ocean acidification, oil spills, deforestation, and ecosystem destruction. Communities located near extraction sites often experience serious public health and environmental justice concerns.

The transition toward renewable energy technologies such as solar, wind, and hydrogen has accelerated in recent years. Nevertheless, renewable infrastructure remains expensive and unevenly distributed, particularly in developing economies. Geopolitical tensions also shape fossil fuel debates. Major energy-producing states maintain strong economic interests in continued fossil fuel production, while energy-importing countries focus on diversification and energy independence.

Technological solutions such as carbon capture and storage, cleaner extraction methods, and sustainable fuel alternatives have emerged as potential compromises between economic development and environmental protection.

The challenge for the international community lies in balancing environmental sustainability with economic stability and global energy demands.

Main Countries Involved

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is one of the world's largest oil exporters and strongly depends on fossil fuel revenues for economic development.





United States

The United States is a major producer and consumer of fossil fuels while also investing heavily in renewable energy technologies.



China

China remains heavily dependent on coal and fossil fuels, but it also leads global investment in renewable energy infrastructure.



Russia

Russia relies significantly on fossil fuel exports and maintains a strong geopolitical influence through global energy markets.



India

India faces the challenge of balancing economic growth and industrial development with climate and sustainability goals.



Additional Stakeholder Positions

Country/Entity	Position on Fossil Fuels
Germany	Strong advocate for renewable transition; phase-out of coal by 2038; faces energy security trade-offs.
Brazil	Significant biofuels producer; balances Amazon protection with offshore oil exploration.



Country/Entity	Position on Fossil Fuels
Nigeria	Oil-dependent economy; advocates for transition support and environmental remediation of extractive zones.
Small Island States (AOSIS)	Demand a rapid fossil fuel phase-out due to the existential climate threat.
European Union	Carbon border adjustment mechanism; promotes green deal but depends on imported fossil fuels
OPEC (observer status)	Argues fossil fuels remain essential for global energy security; supports carbon capture rather than phase-out.

Previous attempts

The international community has adopted multiple climate agreements aimed at reducing fossil fuel dependence and carbon emissions. The Paris Agreement established global temperature targets and encouraged states to submit national climate action plans.

Organizations such as UNEP and the IPCC have repeatedly called for accelerated transitions toward renewable energy and sustainable development.

Some countries have introduced carbon taxes, emissions trading systems, and renewable energy incentives. Others continue expanding fossil fuel exploration and production due to economic and geopolitical considerations. Technological innovation, international climate summits, and green financing initiatives have also attempted to promote cleaner energy transitions.



Possible solutions

- Expanding investment in renewable energy infrastructure.
- Increasing international funding for green transitions in developing countries.
- Developing carbon capture and storage technologies.
- Strengthening international emissions regulations.
- Promoting sustainable industrial innovation and cleaner extraction methods.
- Encouraging gradual and economically stable energy transitions.
- Expanding environmental protection standards for extraction industries.
- Enhancing international cooperation on climate adaptation and energy security.

Guiding Questions for Delegates

1. Should fossil fuel-producing countries receive compensation for transitioning away from extraction?
2. How can UNEA address the environmental harms of extraction without overstepping the UNFCCC's climate mandate?
3. Is carbon capture a genuine solution or a justification for continued extraction?
4. What obligations do historically high-emitting nations have to finance developing countries' energy transitions?
5. Should international law recognize a right to fossil fuel phase-out assistance?
6. How should the committee balance energy security concerns (e.g., post-invasion Europe) with climate commitments?



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